

What Are They Looking For? Risk Factors That Students Privately Address on the Computer in Discipline Settings

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ABSTRACT

A Georgia school district's comprehensive Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative included use of a self-regulated, computerized, social-emotional learning intervention, as a tertiary intervention for discipline-related problems. Between 2004 and 2007, 3,685 mostly low income, African American students in 40 elementary, middle and high schools were assigned self-regulated, reading-independent lessons matched to their offenses and were encouraged also to explore underlying reasons for their behavior. A third party evaluator used tracking data from the software to determine the degree to which students explored personal risk factors and what kinds of lessons students most commonly chose to explore. The computer-generated data indicated that 31% of the lessons students completed were for their disciplinary infractions, 35% were for remedial skill-building to enhance protective factors related to those offenses, and 34% were related to personal risk factors. Trauma related issues, such as physical abuse, parental addiction, and relationship abuse were the most frequent subjects of personal exploration. This finding supports the hypotheses that unresolved trauma may be a key factor in conduct problems, and that children and adolescents will take advantage of the opportunity to privately address this trauma on the computer, to potentially positive effect.

KEYWORDS: risk factors; positive behavioral interventions; school discipline; trauma; computer-based interventions